

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-07 EB-07 COME-00 OMB-01
TRSE-00 DHA-02 ORM-02 /100 W
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R 041404Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5994
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 3125

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, IS, UR
SUBJECT: SOVIET/ISRAELI RELATIONS

REFS: (A) JERUSALEM 559, (B) TEL AVIV 2944, (C) USUN 1320

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE ISRAELI FOREIGN MINISTRY VIEWS RECENT RUMORS ABOUT THE RESUMPTION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION AS A PROBABLE INDICATION OF THE SOVIET DESIRE TO PLAY A GREATER MIDDLE EAST ROLE WHILE THERE HAVE BEEN NO CONCRETE EFFORTS BY THE USSR TO RESUME RELATIONS, A DIFFERENCE IN THE TONE OF ITS RECENT STATEMENTS REGARDING ISRAEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST HAS BEEN OBSERVED. THE RECENT VISIT OF THREE SOVIET OFFICERS TO JERUSALEM UNDER UN AUSPICES SHOULD NOT BE REGARDED AS CONFIDENTIAL

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AN INDICATION OR SIGNAL OF ISRAELI INTENTIONS AS REGARDS RELATIONS. THE "INTORG" AFFAIR WAS POORLY HANDLED BY THE ISRAELI CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND MIGHT, INDEED, HAVE BEEN INSPIRED BY MOSCOW. INDICATIONS FROM MOSCOW ARE THAT THE INITIATIVE FOR A RESUMPTION IN RELATIONS MUST COME FROM ISRAEL; ISRAEL HOLDS THE OPPOSITE VIEW. IT APPEARS

THAT THE USSR IS INTERESTED NOW IN A RESUMPTION OF DIALOGUE WITH ISRAEL, BUT IS NOT YET READY FOR A RESUMPTION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. ONE PROBLEM (FOR THE SOVIETS) WHICH WOULD LIKELY RISE WHEN RELATIONS ARE RESTORED IS THAT AN ISRAELI EMBASSY IN MOSCOW MIGHT BECOME A RALLYING POINT FOR SOVIET DISSIDENTS AND THERE COULD BE AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF REQUESTS FOR EXIT PERMITS. END SUMMARY

1. IN A CONVERSATION MAY 2 WITH GOVRIN, DIRECTOR OF EASTERN EUROPEAN AFFAIRS AT THE MFA, POLITICAL COUNSELOR INQUIRED AS TO ISRAELI VIEWS OF RECENT RUMORS ABOUT RESUMPTION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE SOVIET UNION. SPECIFIC REFERENCE WAS MADE TO RECENT PRESS REPORTS REGARDING A TENTATIVE MOVE TOWARD COMMERCIAL TIES (REFTEL B) AND THE VISIT TO JERUSALEM BY THREE SOVIET OFFICERS ASSIGNED TO UN FORCES IN CAIRO. GOVRIN AGREED THAT THESE REPORTS, TOGETHER WITH THE SOVIET MEMORANDUM WARNING EGYPT NOT TO ATTACK LIBYA AND THE ASAD VISIT TO MOSCOW, PROBABLY REFLECT THE SOVIET DESIRE TO PLAY A GREATER MIDDLE EAST ROLE. IT IS NOT YET CLEAR WHETHER, OR WHEN, THAT ROLE MIGHT INCLUDE THE REESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL. HE SAID THE MINISTRY'S ASSESSMENT IS THAT MOSCOW CONSIDERS THAT IF THERE HAD BEEN A SOVIET EMBASSY IN ISRAEL, THE SOVIET UNION COULD HAVE HAD MORE TO SAY TO ISRAEL ON CONFIDENTIAL

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SUCH SUBJECTS AS SINAI II AND LEBANON--IN OTHER WORDS, THE SOVIET UNION IS OUT OF THE GAME AND NOW WANTS BACK IN.

2. NEVERTHELESS, GOVRIN NOTED, THERE HAVE BEEN NO PRACTICAL, VISIBLE EFFORTS BY THE USSR TO RESUME RELATIONS. THERE HAS, HOWEVER, BEEN A DIFFERENCE IN THE TONE OF RECENT SOVIET STATEMENTS AND PRONOUNCEMENTS REGARDING ISRAEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST. THE OCTOBER 2 STATEMENT ON THE MIDDLE EAST OMITTED THE USUAL CRITICISM OF ISRAEL AND EXPLICITLY NOTED ITS RIGHT TO EXIST. BREZHNEV'S TULA SPEECH AND HIS SPEECH TO THE TRADES UNION CONGRESS HAD REPEATED THIS NEW TONE. GOVRIN ADDED THAT HE DETECTED AN IMPROVEMENT ALSO IN SOVIET RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. AS FAR AS THE MIDDLE EAST IS CONCERNED--THE MIDDLE EAST AS AN ISSUE HAS BECOME LESS CONTENTIOUS BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THE USSR.

3. IT MAY ALSO BE SIGNIFICANT, GOVRIN SAID, THAT MOSCOW HAS NEITHER DENIED NOR DENOUNCED THE RECENT REPORTS AND RUMORS OF RESUMPTION OF TIES. IT IS, OF COURSE, ALSO SIGNIFICANT THAT ARAFAT WAS TOLD IN MOSCOW THAT THE SOVIET UNION INTENDS AT SOME POINT TO RESUME RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL. (IN THAT CONNECTION, GOVRIN SAID ARAFAT WAS TOLD THAT THE RESUMPTION OF RELATIONS WITH DISCUSSED AT A MEETING BETWEEN ALLON AND GROMYKO, BUT THE SOVIETS DID NOT STATE THAT THE MEETING OCCURRED 18 MONTHS AGO.)

4. GOVRIN SAW THREE REASONS FOR THE RECENT SEMI- STEPS TOWARD A RESUMPTION: FIRST, THE SOVIET UNION IS SEEKING TO ENHANCE ITS POSITION AS CO- CHAIRMAN OF THE MEPC. TO THE EXTENT THAT IS AN IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION, THE SOVIETS MAY WELL PUSH

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TO HAVE RELATIONS REESTABLISHED, OR TO HAVE DEFINITIVE STEPS IN THAT DIRECTION, BEFORE ANY CONFERENCE IS CONVENED AT GENEVA SO THAT IT MAY BE SEEN TO BE IN A POSITION PARALLEL TO THAT OF THE U.S. SECOND, THE SOVIETS MAY WISH TO SHOW THE ARABS, AND THE REST OF THE WORLD, THAT THE SOVIET UNION IS NOT FIRMLY AND IRREVOCABLY COMMITTED TO AUTOMATIC SUPPORT OF THE ARAB CAUSE AND THAT ITS SUPPORT CANNOT BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED BY THE ARABS. THIRD, THE SOVIET UNION MAY BE ATTEMPTING TO INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME OF THE MAY 17 ELECTION IN ISRAEL, ALTHOUGH GOVRIN DISCOUNTED THE LIKELIHOOD OF SUCCESS OF ANY SUCH ATTEMPT.

5. REGARDING THE PRESS REPORTS OF THE VISIT TO JERUSALEM LAST WEEK BY THREE SOVIET OFFICERS STATIONED IN CAIRO, GOVRIN SAID THAT OVER THE YEARS THE UN HAS ASKED REPEATEDLY FOR PERMISSION FOR SUCH OFFICERS TO MAKE PERSONAL VISITS TO JERUSALEM. ON THIS OCCASION THE VISITS WERE APPROVED, BUT THIS APPROVAL REFLECTS NOTHING

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SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-07 IO-13 EB-07 COME-00 OMB-01
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R 041404Z MAY 77
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AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 3125

MORE OR LESS THAN THE VIEWS OF A NEW (ACTING)
PRIME MINISTER; IT IS NOT MEANT
AS AN INDICATION OR SIGNAL
BY ISRAEL TO THE SOVIETS REGARDING DIPLOMATIC
RELATIONS, ALTHOUGH IT MAY BE READ AS SUCH. REGARDING THE
REPORTED CONTACT BETWEEN THE SOVIET (OR GERMAN) FIRM
INTORG AND THE ISRAELI CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
(REFTEL B), GOVRIN SAID THE MATTER HAD BEEN POORLY
HANDLED BY THE CHAMBER BECAUSE IT HAD IMMEDIATELY
RELEASED THE STORY TO THE MEDIA. THE MFA HAS AS
YET HAD NO REQUEST FROM THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
FOR GUIDANCE ON THE MATTER. (NOTE: DESPITE
DENIALS BY INTROG, OBSERVERS HERE ARE NOT
COMPLETELY CONVINCED THAT ITS APPROACH WAS NOT
INSPIRED BY MOSCOW.)
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6. GOVRIN SAID THAT THE ISRAELIS HAVE WHAT THEY
CONSIDER TO BE CLEAR INDICATIONS FROM MOSCOW THAT
THE INITIATIVE FOR A RESUMPTION IN RELATIONS MUST
COME FROM THE GOI. HOWEVER, ISRAEL MAINTAINS THAT
IT DID NOT BREAK RELATIONS IN 1967 AND THAT IT IS,
THEREFORE, UP TO THE SOVIET UNION TO TAKE THE
FIRST STEP TOWARD RESUMPTION; THE SOVIETS WILL

FIND ISRAEL READY TO RESPOND. HE NOED THAT ON AN EARLIER OCCASION (IN 1953) ISRAEL HAD INDEED TAKEN THE INITIATIVE TO REESTABLISH RELATIONS, WHICH MAY LEAD THE SOVIETS TO EXPECT THIS TO HAPPEN AGAIN. ISRAEL EXPECTS THE MOST LIKELY COURSE OF ACTION WILL BE THAT THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR AT SOME CAPITAL WILL APPROACH THE ISRAELI AMBASSADOR TO SUGGEST DISCUSSIONS LEADING TOWARD A RESUMPTION. SUMMING UP,GOVRIN SAID IT APPEARS THAT THE SOVIET UNION PRESENTLY IS INTERESTED IN RESUMPTION OF A DIALOGUE WITH ISRAEL BUT IS NOT YET READY FOR A RESUMPTION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS.

7. GOVRIN POINTED OUT THAT ISRAEL IS VERY MUCH AWARE THAT THE RESUMPTION OF RELATIONS POSES A DIFFICULT DECISION FOR SOVIET AUTHORITIES. RE-OPENING AN ISRELI EMBASSY IN MOSCOW AND RAISING THE ISRAELI FLG THERE WOULD SERVE AS A RALLYING POINT FOR SOVIET DISSIDENTS AND WOULD PROBABLY INCREASE THE NUMBER OF REQUESTS FOR EXIT PERMITS TO EMIGRATE TO ISRAEL. HE NOED THAT THE ISRAELI EMBASSY IN MOSCOW HAD BEEN A TRUBLESOME ISSUE IN THE '60'S BECAUSE OF ITS ROLE AS A FOCAL POINT FOR THOSE WHOM SOVIET AUTHORITIES REGARDED AS TROUBLE-MAKERS. AT THE SAME TIME THERE WOULD ALSO BE A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF INTERNAL OPPOSITION WITHIN ISRAEL. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF ISRAELIS WHO WILL

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ARGUE THAT DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS SHOULD NOT BE REESTABLISHED WITH THE SOVIET UNION WITHOUT A FIRM SOVIET COMMITMENT TO GRANT EXIT PERMITS TO ANY JEW WISHING TO EMIGRATE TO ISRAEL, THE KIND OF COMMITMENT IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR THE SOVIET AUTHORITIES TO MAKE THERE WOULD PROBABLY BE A DIFFERENCE OF OPINON AMONG ISRAELIS OF RUSSIAN EXTRACTION, WITH SOME ARGUING FOR A RESUMPTION OF RELATIONS AND SOME ADAMANTLY OPPOSED.

8. COMMENT: RESUMPTION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION IS A SUBJECT WHICH HAS ARISEN FROM TIME TO TIME IN ISRAEL BUT THE CURRENT DISCUSSION APPEARS TO BE BASED ON MORE SOLID SIGNALS THAN HAS BEEN TURE FOR SOME TIME. ISRAELIS ARE AMBIVALENT ABOUT RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION AND IT WILL BE DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO MAKE A CLEAR CHOICE BETWEEN WHAT THEY PERCEIVE TO BE THE ADVANTAGES AND THE DISADVANTAGES.

9. DISADVANTAGES INCLUDE THEIR PERCEPTION OF THE NUISANCE VALUE OF A SOVIET MISSION (AND PROBABLE SUBSEQUENT MISSIONS FROM OTHER EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES). THERE WOULD BE PROBLEMS OF DEMONSTRATIONS OUTSIDE THESE MISSIONS, SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS AND QUESTIONS OF SURVEILLANCE OF EASTERN EUROPEAN MISSIONS, ETC., WHICH THE ISRAELIS HAVE NOT HAD TO FACE WITH ONLY A SMALL ROMANIAN EMBASSY OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS. THE RESUMPTION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WOULD ALSO BE PERCEIVED AS GIVING THE SOVIET UNION A FRONT SEAT IN THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS WHICH IT DOES NOT HAVE AT THE PRESENT TIME--ISRAELIS HAVE NOT BEEN DISTRESSED TO SEE THE SOVIET UNION LARGELY EXCLUDED FROM THE PEACE PROCESS EXCEPT FOR ITS MINIMAL ROLE AT GENEVA.

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10. ADVANTAGES PERCEIVED BY THE ISRAELIS WOULD INCLUDE: (A) THE POSSIBILITY FOR A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF DIPLOMATIC MANEUVERING; THE PRESENCE OF A SOVIET EMBASSY WOULD ENABLE THE ISRAELIS TO REACT DIRECTLY AND IMMEDIATELY TO SOVIET ACTIONS AND RELATIONS WITH ARABS. (B) THE SIMPLE FACT THAT MOST ARAB COUNTRIES WOULD SEE THE RESUMPTION OF RELATIONS AS A NEGATIVE STEP IS ENOUGH TO CAUSE ISRAELIS TO VIEW IT IN A SOMEWHAT POSITIVE LIGHT. (C) RESUMPTION OF RELATIONS WOULD BE INTERPRETED AS A CONCRETE EXPRESSION OF SOVIET RECOGNITION OF THE RIGHT OF ISRAEL TO EXIST AND THIS EXPRESSION OF SUPPORT FOR ISRAELI LEGITIMACY WOULD PROBABLY BE HELPFUL IN THE RESTORATION OF ISRAELI RELATIONS WITH THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES, PARTICULARLY AFRICAN, A GOAL WHICH REMAINS IMPORTANT TO ISRAEL. (D) FINALLY, THE ISRAELIS WOULD PROBABLY SEE THE RESUMPTION OF RELATIONS AS A POTENTIALLY HELPFUL STEP IN MAINTAINING TIES WITH SOVIET JEWRY. (COMMERCIAL CONSIDERATIONS WOULD PROBABLY BE MINIMAL SINCE ISRAEL COULD NOT EXPECT MORE THAN SOME GRADUAL BROADENING OF THE PRESENT VERY LIMITED TRADE WITH EASTERN EUROPE.) ON BALANCE, THEREFORE, WE BELIEVE THAT ISREL WILL BE RECEPTIVE TO ANY OVERTURE FROM THE SOVIET UNION AN MAY, IN FACT, DO WHAT IT CAN TO ENCOURAGE SUCH AN OVERTURE.

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